

Open water, rich farm lands lured Swedes to area

In the first half of the 19th century, Sweden found itself in the midst of a crisis.

The nation's population had increased by 48 percent. Family farms had been divided and subdivided so much among heirs that plots were too small to support a family.

At the same time, reports streamed back from earlier immigrants who had found a better way of life in the United States. Hundreds of thousands of Swedes decided to make the move, and many of them came to Wisconsin.

Leaving a land of forests and cold climate, they chose a similar place. In Wisconsin they found new economic opportunities. Hardworking, thrifty and conscientious, they soon became entrepreneurs. Many owned livery stables, blacksmith shops, jewelry stores, drug

stores, photography studios and butcher shops.

The forests drew them as timber cruisers, lumberjacks and river drivers. Some worked in the iron ore mines.

Swedish women were excellent cooks, specializing in baked goods. And the women shared recipes with their neighbors of many nationalities. The Swedes were noted for hearty limpa bread of rye flour and molasses, Lucia buns with saffron and raisins, Spritz cookies that melt in one's mouth, and Swedish coffee cakes rich with butter.

Today the largest population of Swedes is found in California, followed by the eastern coastal states and then the Great Lakes states. They were attracted to this area because it offered rich farm lands and fishing. Love of the open water has al-



Throughout this year of Wisconsin's Sesquicentennial celebration, the Press-Gazette will publish a series of stories on local history. This feature, prepared with the assistance of the Brown County Historical Society, will appear on Mondays.



ways been a Viking heritage. Some new arrivals were housed in their churches; others would live in earth homes until they could build a more suitable residence.

The lives of these immigrants of the 1840s form an interesting chapter in the history of Wisconsin. Stockholm, the first Swedish settlement in western Wisconsin, initially was beset by economic woes. But the set-

tlement slowly began to prosper as its residents sold grain, fish, cordwood and ice from Lake Pepin.

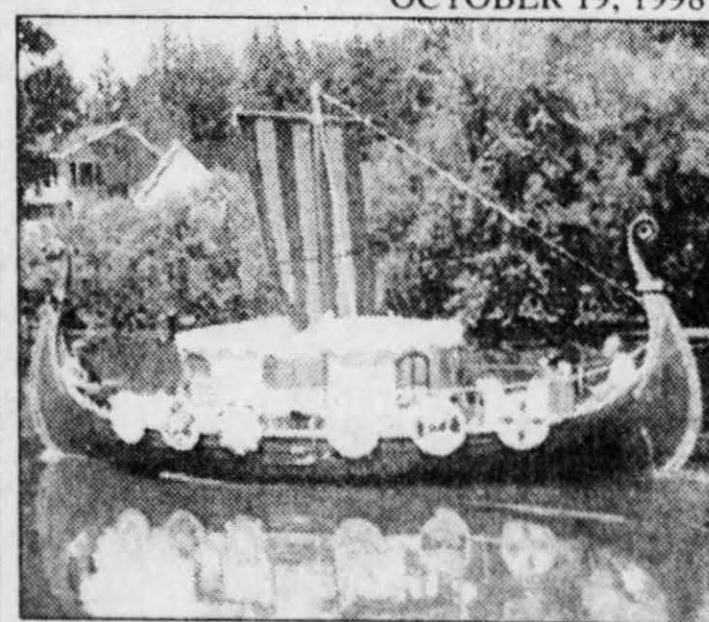
Swedes bound for Wisconsin generally entered the United States at New York or New Jersey. Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans and other coastal cities also served as ports of entry. It was not uncommon for them to sail to Quebec. A great number of them held tickets

to Midwest destinations and did not linger in the East.

By the late 1890s and early 1900s, a large group of Swedes settled in Door County. Many generations stayed. Al Johnson's Restaurant is one example of these many establishments and families. Some located in the Milwaukee and Racine areas. Annual Swedish festivals are held in Racine and Eagle.

A Swedish American Club, known as Vasa Order of America, has Lodges all over the United States. The Milwaukee chapter, Linde Lodge, was founded in the 1920s. In Green Bay the Lindgren Lodge, founded in the 1990s, held a June festival at Legion Park in De Pere.

Submitted by Ruth Windel,
Lindgren Lodge historian



Lindgren Lodge

Examples of the Swedish presence in our area include Don Lindgren's Viking boat, above, in Suamico and Al Johnson's Restaurant in Sister Bay. The goats grazing on the restaurant roof have been a popular Door County tourist attraction for years.